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DEATH-HUNT

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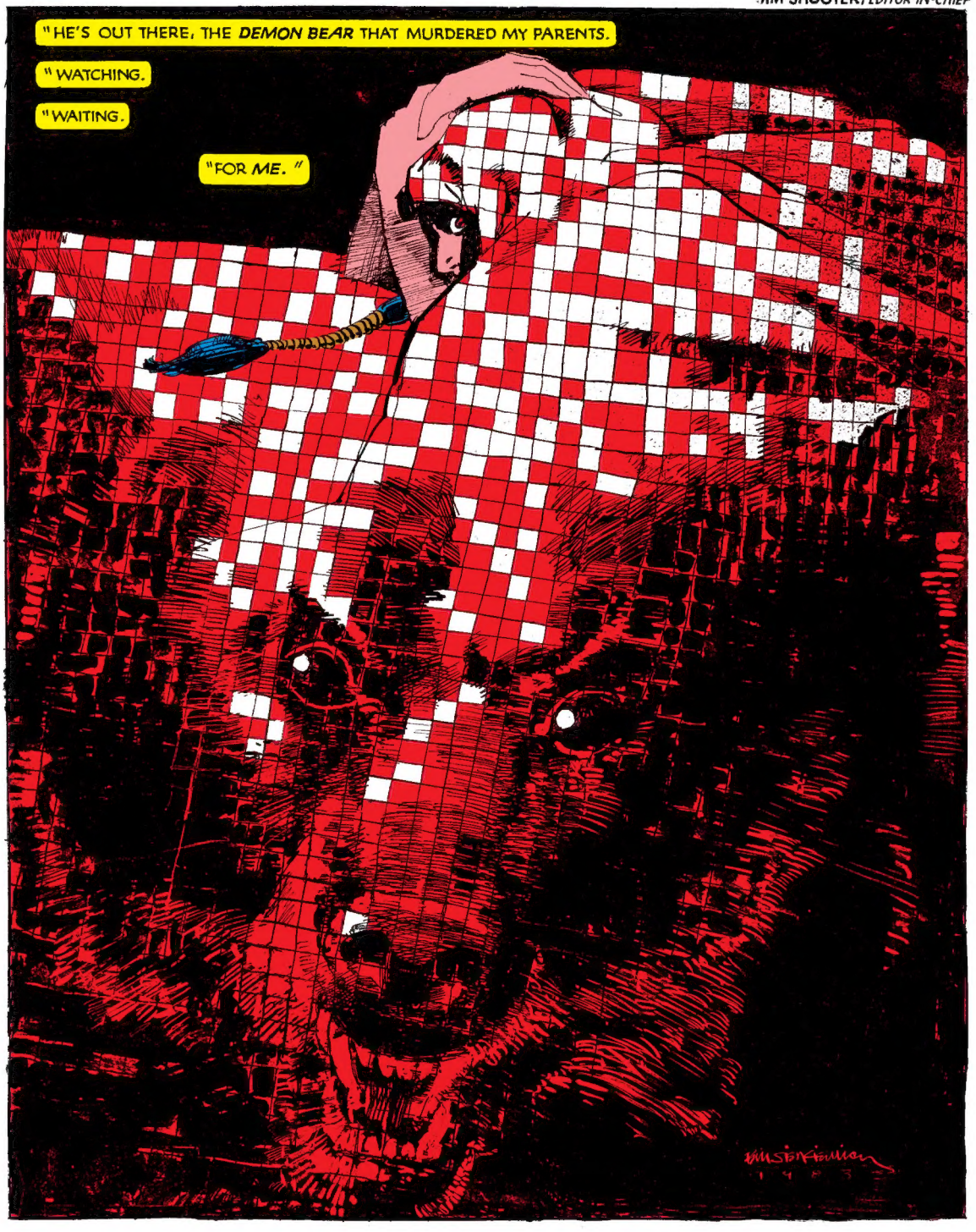

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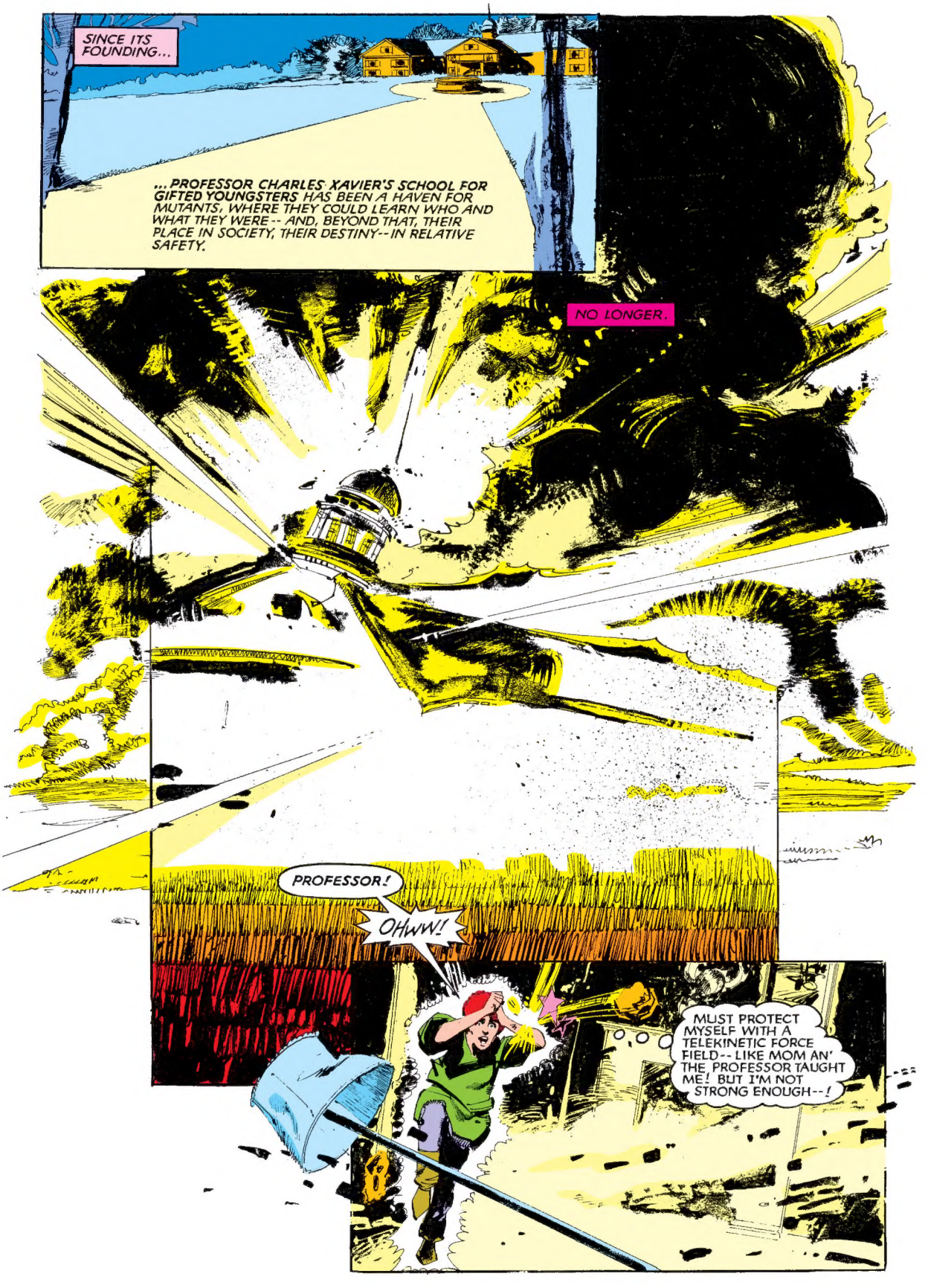
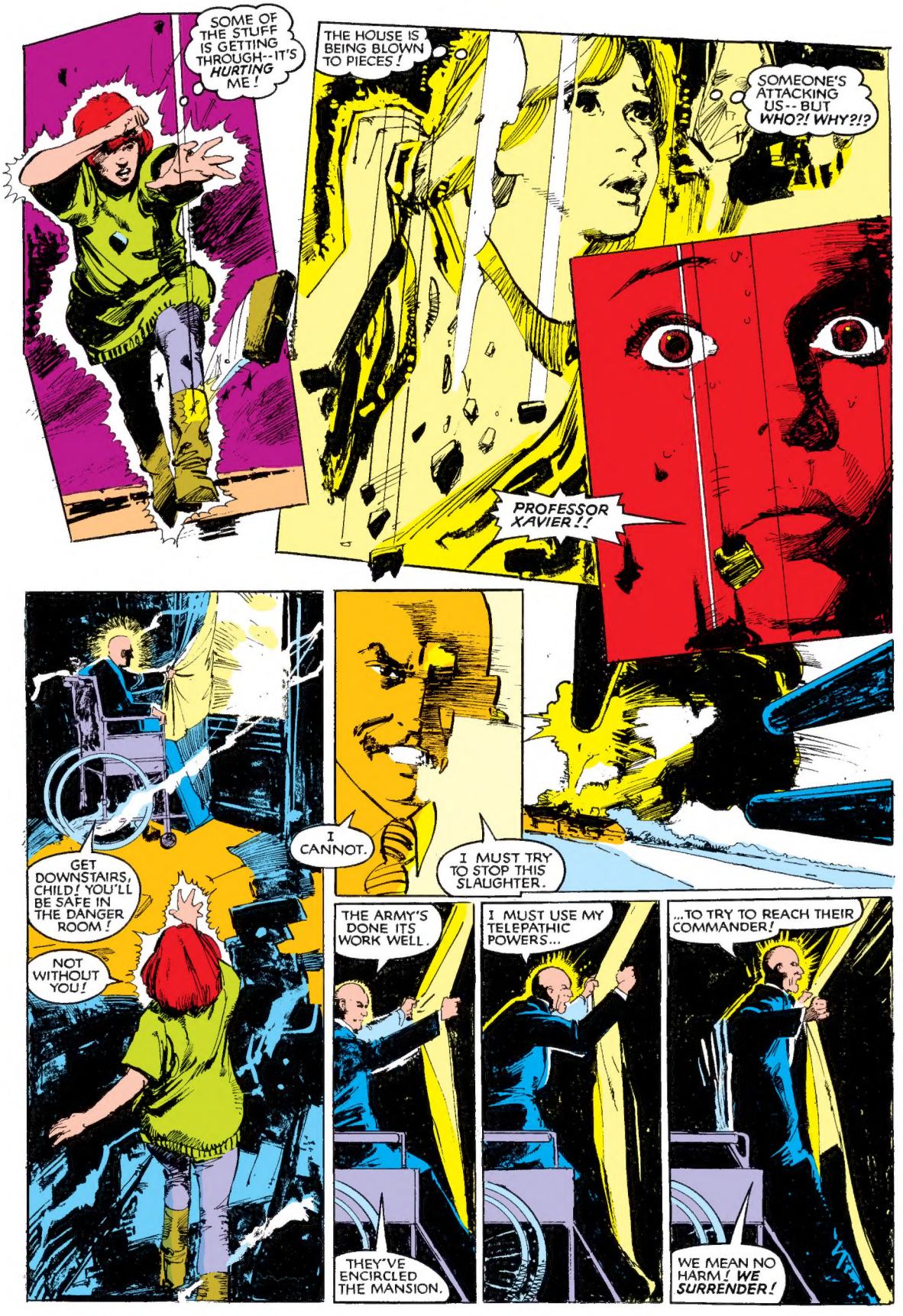

SINCE ITS FOUNDING...
...PROFESSOR CHARLES XAVIER'S SCHOOL FOR GIFTED YOUNGSTERS HAS BEEN A HAVEN FOR MUTANTS, WHERE THEY COULD LEARN WHO AND WHAT THEY WERE -- AND, BEYOND THAT, THEIR PLACE IN SOCIETY, THEIR DESTINY--IN RELATIVE SAFETY.
NO LONGER.
PROFESSOR!
OHWW!
MUST PROTECT MYSELF WITH A TELEKINETIC FORCE FIELD-- LIKE MOM AN' THE PROFESSOR TAUGHT ME! BUT I'M NOT STRONG ENOUGH--!


SOME OF THE STUFF IS GETTING THROUGH--IT'S HURTING ME!
THE HOUSE IS BEING BLOWN TO PIECES!
SOMEONE'S ATTACKING US-- BUT WHO?! WHY?!?
PROFESSOR XAVIER!!
GET DOWNSTAIRS, CHILD! YOU'LL BE SAFE IN THE DANGER ROOM!
NOT WITHOUT YOU!
I CANNOT.
I MUST TRY TO STOP THIS SLAUGHTER.
THE ARMY'S DONE ITS WORK WELL.
THEY'VE ENCIRCLED THE MANSION.
I MUST USE MY TELEPATHIC POWERS...
...TO TRY TO REACH THEIR COMMANDER!
WE MEAN NO HARM! WE SURRENDER!

BLAM

IN MERCY'S NAME, CEASE FIR--

THE SOLDIERS FOUND ME IN THE RUINS, BY HIS SIDE, THE ONLY SURVIVOR.

THEY USED DRUGS TO NEUTRALIZE MY PSI-TALENT. THE TORTURE CAME LATER, IN PRISON.

IT'S STRANGE, EVERYTHING'S SO PEACEFUL. IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE THAT ALL I REMEMBER-- MY ENTIRE *LIFE*-- HASN'T EVEN HAPPENED YET. IF I'M LUCKY-- IF MY PLAN WORKS-- PERHAPS IT NEVER WILL.

HEY THERE, YOU OKAY?

POLICE!

WAIT-- HE MEANS NO HARM...

...HE'S MORE CONCERNED THAN SUSPICIOUS. I CAN SEE IT IN HIS THOUGHTS.

I MUST LOOK SO RATTY-TATTY...

... HE'S WONDERING IF I'M A RUNAWAY OR A DRUGGIE.

I... I'M FINE, REALLY. I'M HERE TO SEE PROFESSOR XAVIER-- ANY OBJECTIONS?!

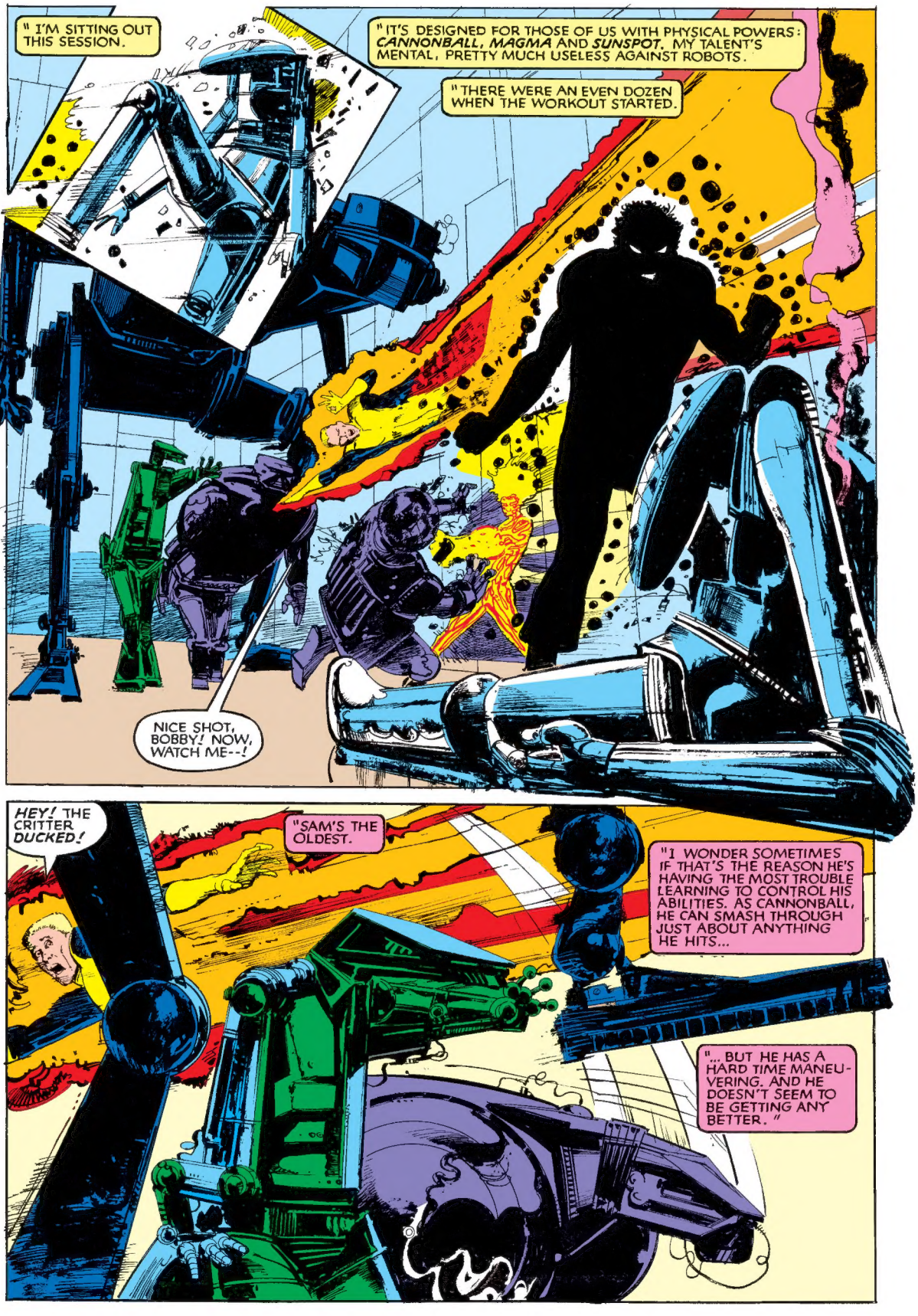
NOPE.

BETTER GET INSIDE, THOUGH-- FORECAST SAYS SNOW.

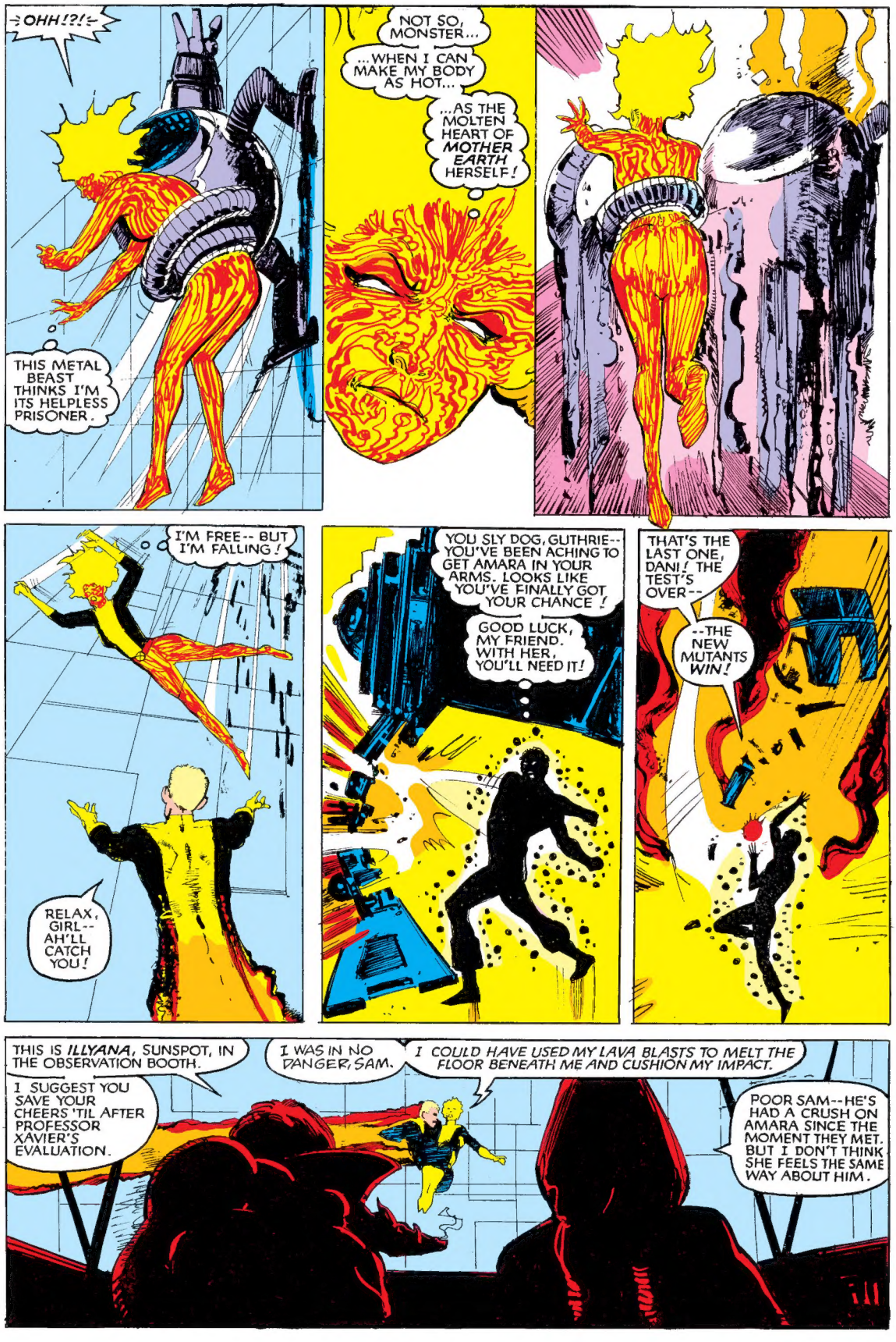
TAKE CARE NOW, YOUNG LADY!

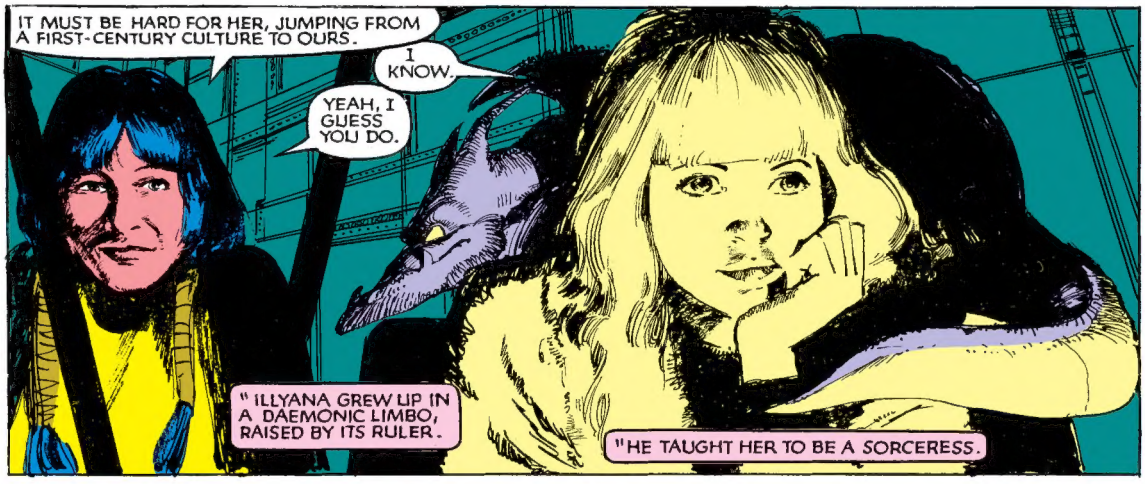
HE'LL BE BACK, TO CHECK MY STORY.

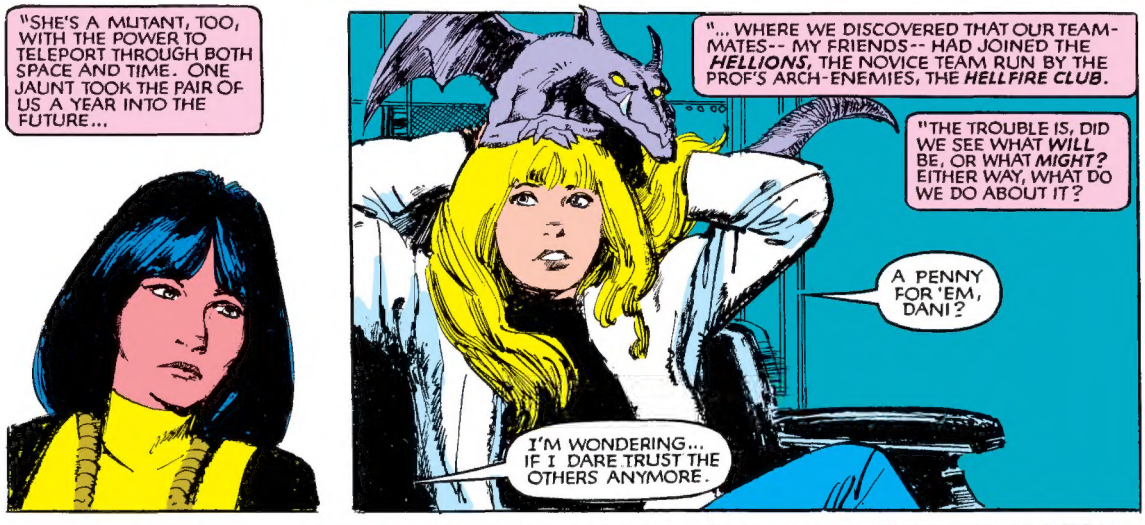
I'VE NO TIME TO WASTE.

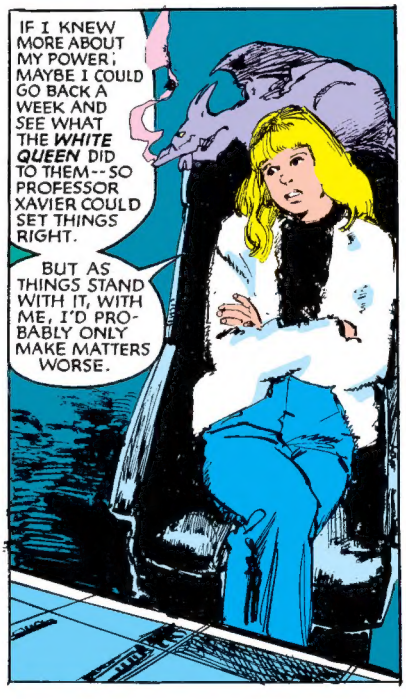

" I'M SITTING OUT THIS SESSION.
" IT'S DESIGNED FOR THOSE OF US WITH PHYSICAL POWERS: *CANNONBALL*, *MAGMA* AND *SUNSPOT*. MY TALENT'S MENTAL, PRETTY MUCH USELESS AGAINST ROBOTS.
" THERE WERE AN EVEN DOZEN WHEN THE WORKOUT STARTED.
NICE SHOT, BOBBY! NOW, WATCH ME--!
HEY! THE CRITTER *DUCKED!*
"SAM'S THE OLDEST.
"I WONDER SOMETIMES IF THAT'S THE REASON HE'S HAVING THE MOST TROUBLE LEARNING TO CONTROL HIS ABILITIES. AS CANNONBALL, HE CAN SMASH THROUGH JUST ABOUT ANYTHING HE HITS...
"... BUT HE HAS A HARD TIME MANEUVERING. AND HE DOESN'T SEEM TO BE GETTING ANY BETTER. "

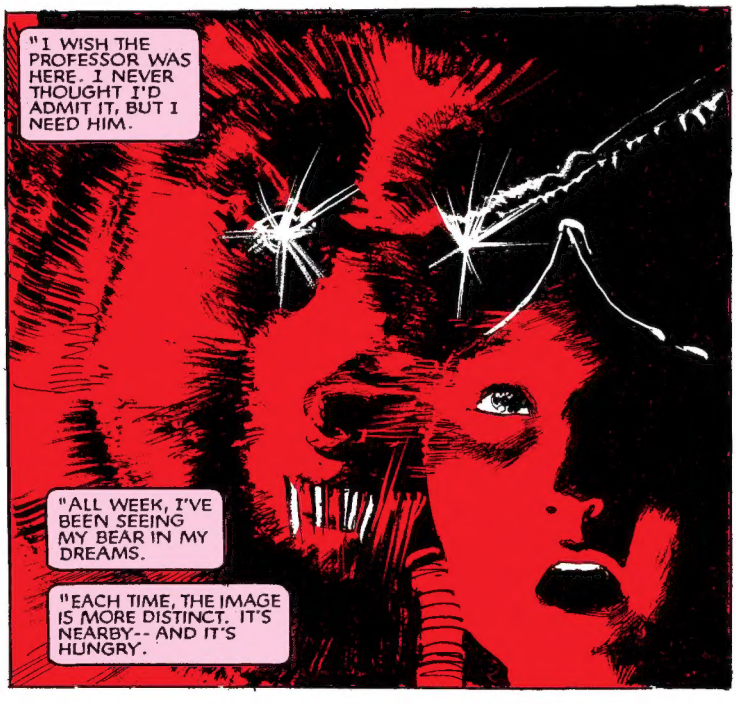
"LUCKILY FOR HIM, SO LONG AS HE'S BLASTING...
AW, SHOOT!
"... HE BECOMES PRETTY NEAR INVULNERABLE."
THAT PUNCH'S THROWIN' ME STRAIGHT FOR 'MARA.
GOTTA CUT POWER-- AN' DO LIKE NIGHTCRAWLER TAUGHT ME--
-- TWIST MY BODY IN MID-AIR...
... AN' THEN CUT LOOSE IN ANOTHER DIRECTION!
AH DID IT!!
SAM?!!
MAGMA-- BEHIND YOU-- LOOK OUT!!

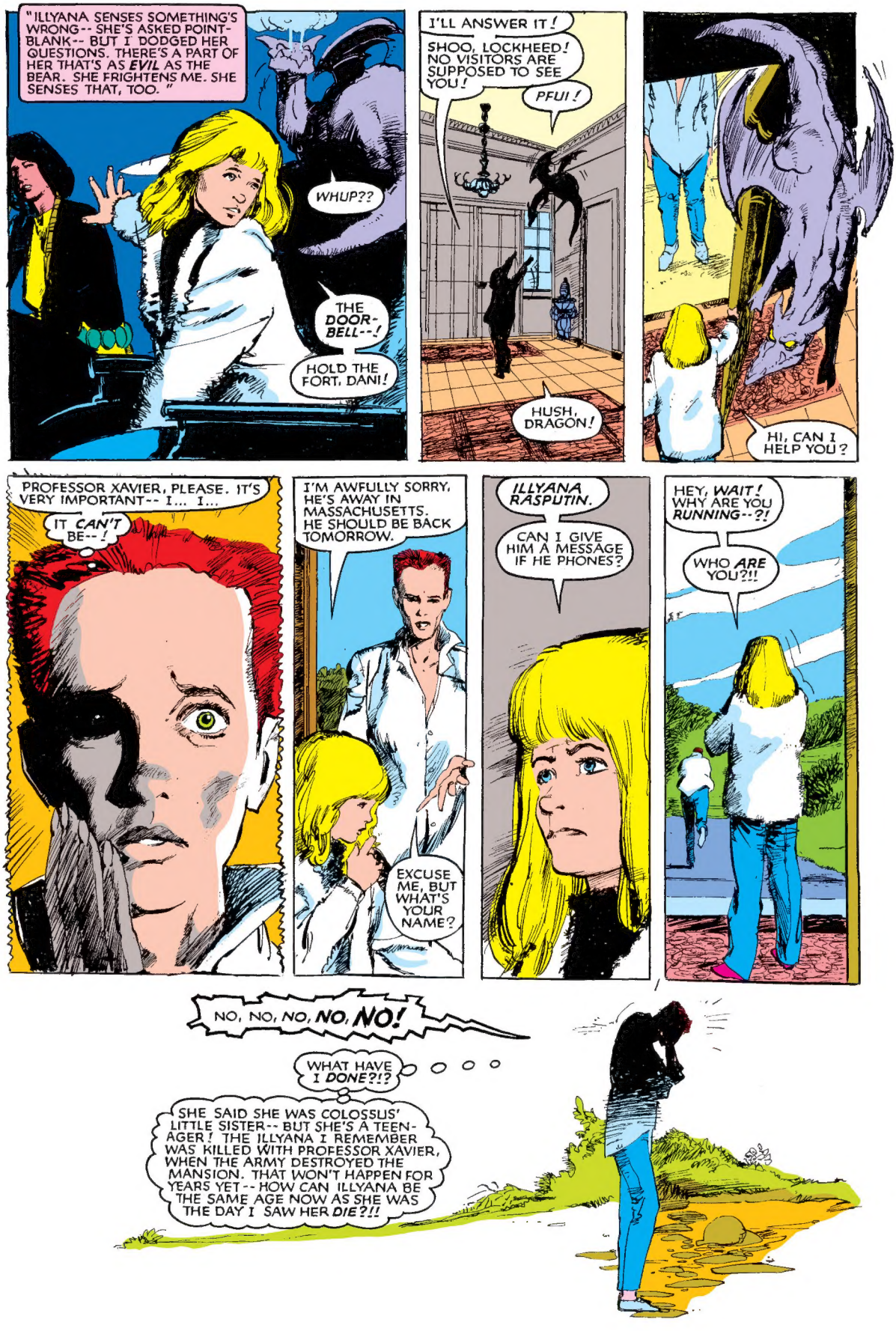

OHH!?!
THIS METAL BEAST THINKS I'M ITS HELPLESS PRISONER.
NOT SO, MONSTER...
...WHEN I CAN MAKE MY BODY AS HOT...
...AS THE MOLTEN HEART OF MOTHER EARTH HERSELF!
I'M FREE-- BUT I'M FALLING!
RELAX, GIRL-- AH'LL CATCH YOU!
YOU SLY DOG, GUTHRIE-- YOU'VE BEEN ACHING TO GET AMARA IN YOUR ARMS. LOOKS LIKE YOU'VE FINALLY GOT YOUR CHANCE!
GOOD LUCK, MY FRIEND. WITH HER, YOU'LL NEED IT!
THAT'S THE LAST ONE, DANI! THE TEST'S OVER--
--THE NEW MUTANTS WIN!
THIS IS ILLYANA, SUNSPOT, IN THE OBSERVATION BOOTH.
I SUGGEST YOU SAVE YOUR CHEERS 'TIL AFTER PROFESSOR XAVIER'S EVALUATION.
I WAS IN NO DANGER, SAM.
I COULD HAVE USED MY LAVA BLASTS TO MELT THE FLOOR BENEATH ME AND CUSHION MY IMPACT.
POOR SAM--HE'S HAD A CRUSH ON AMARA SINCE THE MOMENT THEY MET. BUT I DON'T THINK SHE FEELS THE SAME WAY ABOUT HIM.

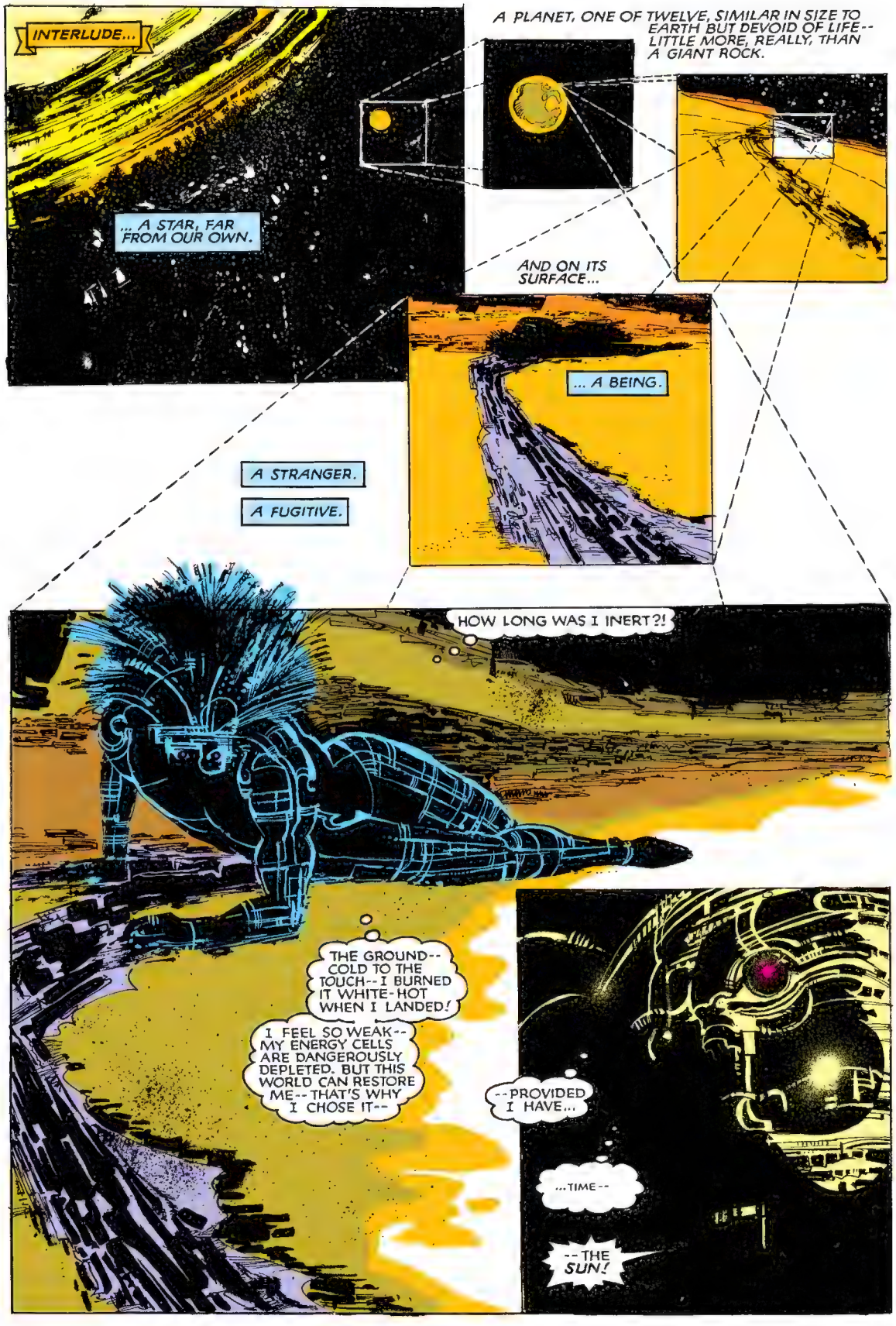

IT MUST BE HARD FOR HER, JUMPING FROM A FIRST-CENTURY CULTURE TO OURS.
I KNOW.
YEAH, I GUESS YOU DO.
"ILLYANA GREW UP IN A DAEMONIC LIMBO, RAISED BY ITS RULER.
"HE TAUGHT HER TO BE A SORCERESS.

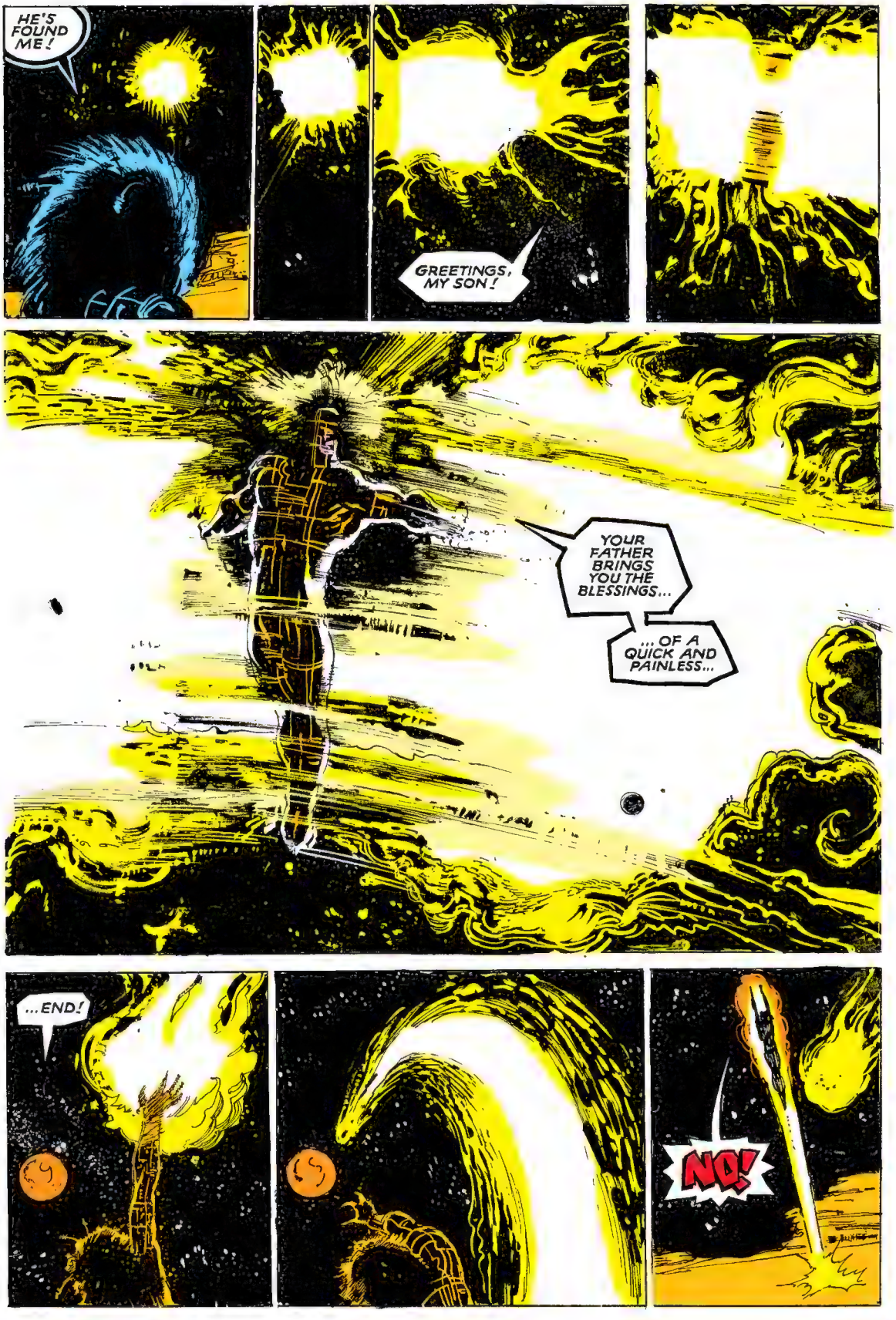

"SHE'S A MUTANT, TOO, WITH THE POWER TO TELEPORT THROUGH BOTH SPACE AND TIME. ONE JAUNT TOOK THE PAIR OF US A YEAR INTO THE FUTURE...
"... WHERE WE DISCOVERED THAT OUR TEAM-MATES-- MY FRIENDS-- HAD JOINED THE HELLIONS, THE NOVICE TEAM RUN BY THE PROF'S ARCH-ENEMIES, THE HELLFIRE CLUB.
"THE TROUBLE IS, DID WE SEE WHAT WILL BE, OR WHAT MIGHT? EITHER WAY, WHAT DO WE DO ABOUT IT?
A PENNY FOR 'EM, DANI?
I'M WONDERING... IF I DARE TRUST THE OTHERS ANYMORE.

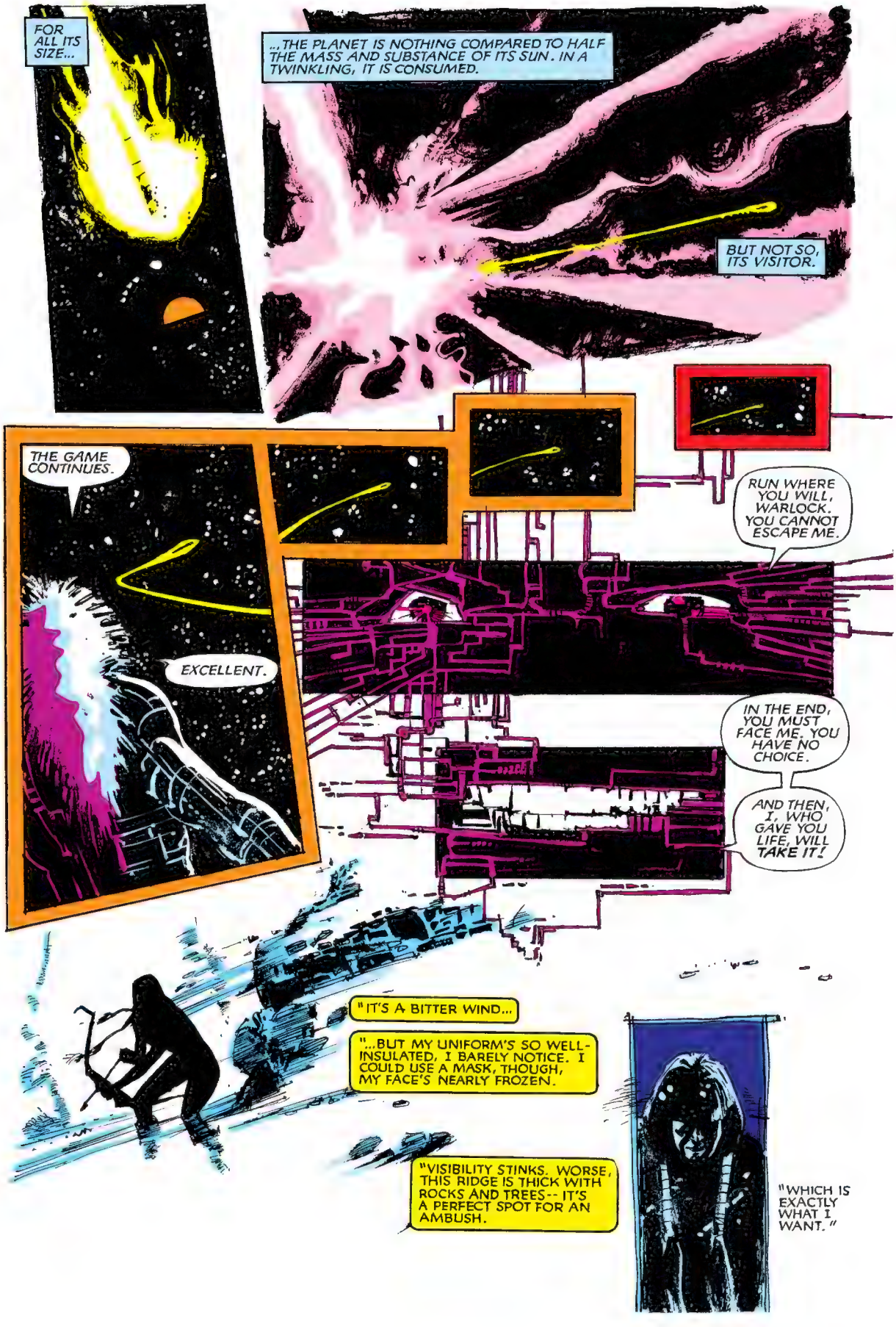

IF I KNEW MORE ABOUT MY POWER; MAYBE I COULD GO BACK A WEEK AND SEE WHAT THE WHITE QUEEN DID TO THEM-- SO PROFESSOR XAVIER COULD SET THINGS RIGHT.
BUT AS THINGS STAND WITH IT, WITH ME, I'D PROBABLY ONLY MAKE MATTERS WORSE.


"I WISH THE PROFESSOR WAS HERE. I NEVER THOUGHT I'D ADMIT IT, BUT I NEED HIM.
"ALL WEEK, I'VE BEEN SEEING MY BEAR IN MY DREAMS.
"EACH TIME, THE IMAGE IS MORE DISTINCT. IT'S NEARBY-- AND IT'S HUNGRY.

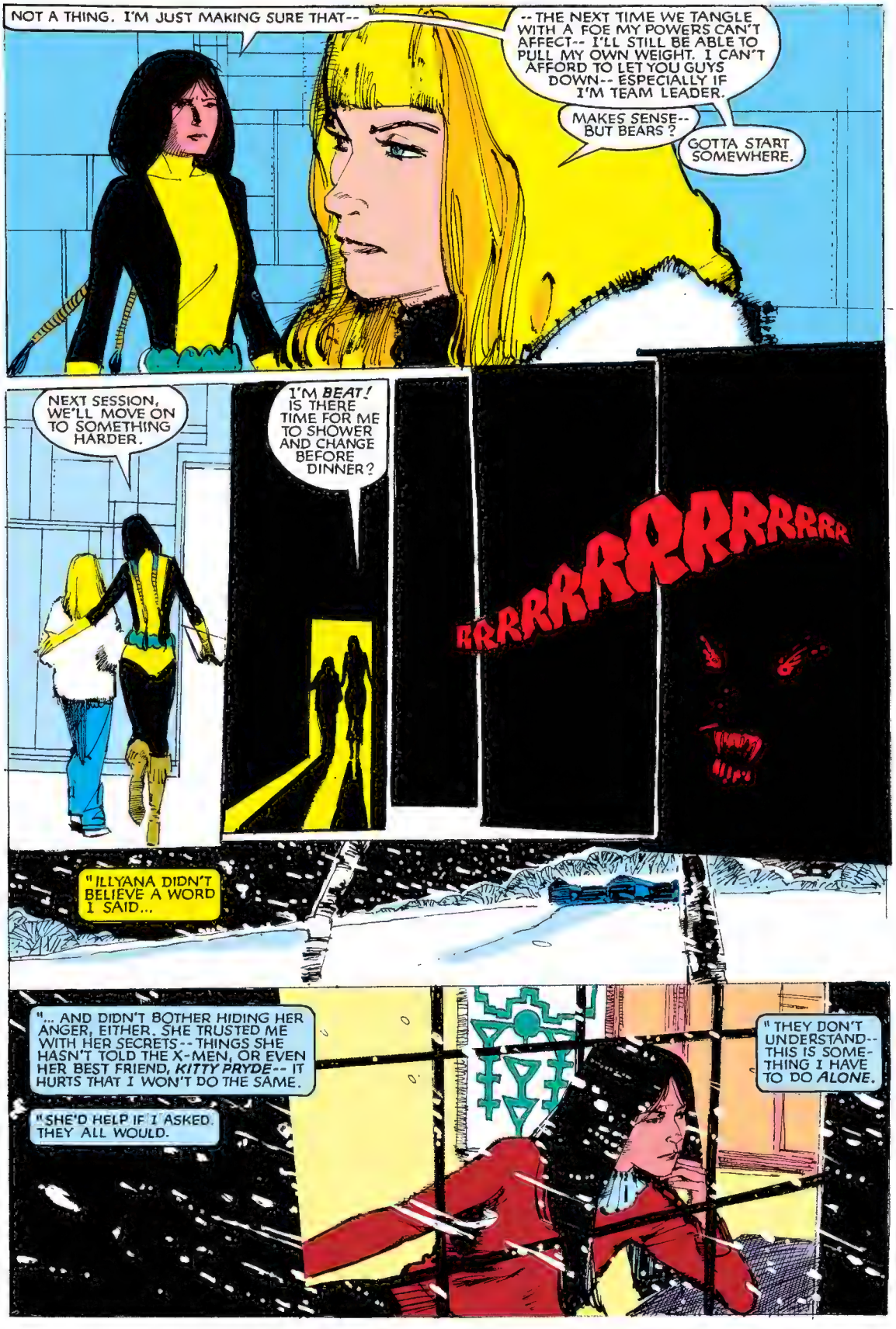

"ILLYANA SENSES SOMETHING'S WRONG-- SHE'S ASKED POINT-BLANK-- BUT I DODGED HER QUESTIONS. THERE'S A PART OF HER THAT'S AS EVIL AS THE BEAR. SHE FRIGHTENS ME. SHE SENSES THAT, TOO. "
WHUP??
THE DOOR-BELL--!
HOLD THE FORT, DAN!
I'LL ANSWER IT!
SHOO, LOCKHEED! NO VISITORS ARE SUPPOSED TO SEE YOU!
PFUI!
HUSH, DRAGON!
HI, CAN I HELP YOU?
PROFESSOR XAVIER, PLEASE. IT'S VERY IMPORTANT-- I... I...
IT CAN'T BE--!
I'M AWFULLY SORRY, HE'S AWAY IN MASSACHUSETTS. HE SHOULD BE BACK TOMORROW.
EXCUSE ME, BUT WHAT'S YOUR NAME?
ILLYANA RASPUTIN.
CAN I GIVE HIM A MESSAGE IF HE PHONES?
HEY, WAIT! WHY ARE YOU RUNNING--?!
WHO ARE YOU?!!
NO, NO, NO, NO, NO!
WHAT HAVE I DONE?!?
SHE SAID SHE WAS COLOSSUS' LITTLE SISTER-- BUT SHE'S A TEEN-AGER! THE ILLYANA I REMEMBER WAS KILLED WITH PROFESSOR XAVIER, WHEN THE ARMY DESTROYED THE MANSION. THAT WON'T HAPPEN FOR YEARS YET-- HOW CAN ILLYANA BE THE SAME AGE NOW AS SHE WAS THE DAY I SAW HER DIE?!!

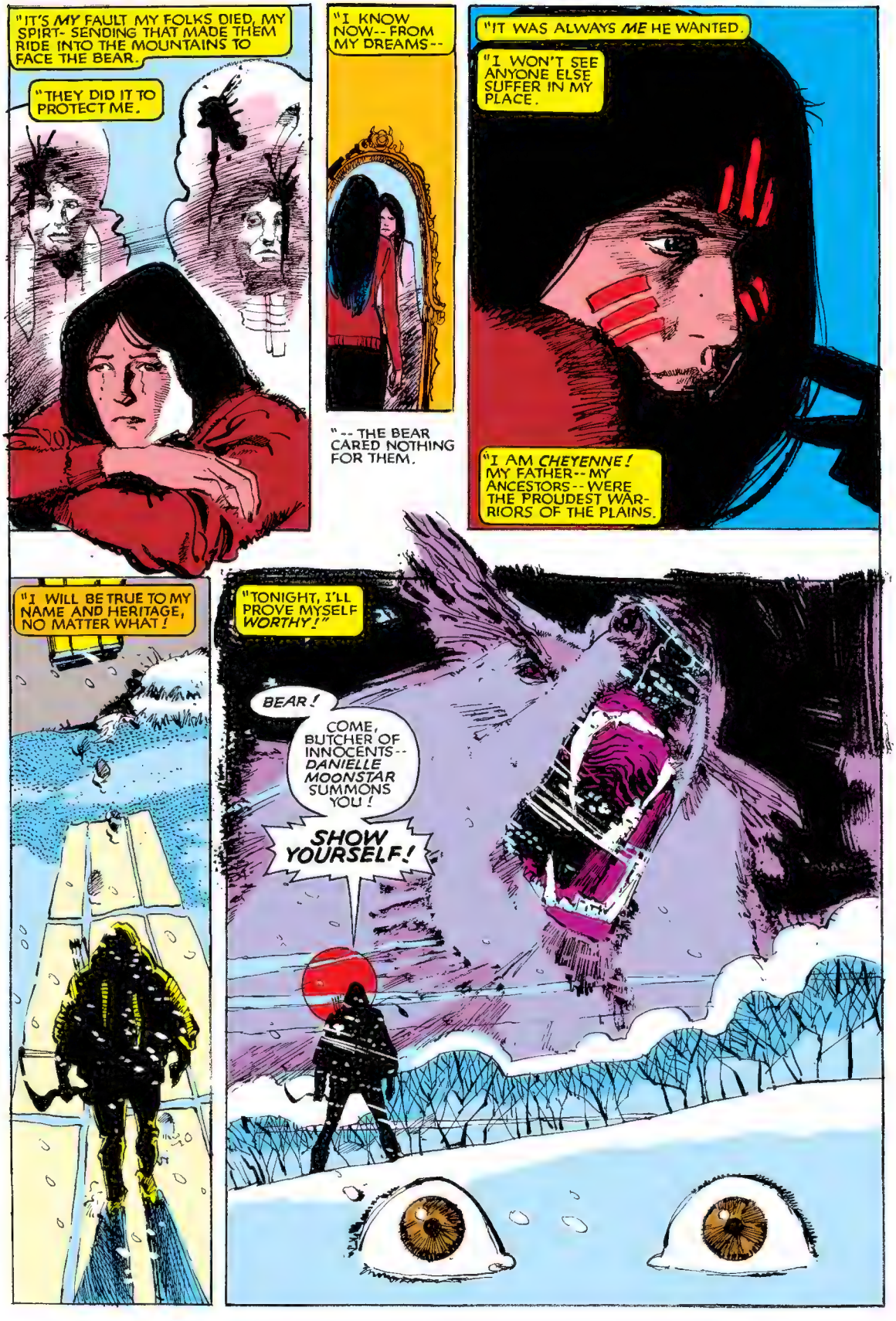

INTERLUDE...
... A STAR, FAR FROM OUR OWN.
A PLANET, ONE OF TWELVE, SIMILAR IN SIZE TO EARTH BUT DEVOID OF LIFE-- LITTLE MORE, REALLY, THAN A GIANT ROCK.
AND ON ITS SURFACE...
... A BEING.
A STRANGER.
A FUGITIVE.
HOW LONG WAS I INERT?!
THE GROUND-- COLD TO THE TOUCH-- I BURNED IT WHITE-HOT WHEN I LANDED!
I FEEL SO WEAK-- MY ENERGY CELLS ARE DANGEROUSLY DEPLETED. BUT THIS WORLD CAN RESTORE ME-- THAT'S WHY I CHOSE IT--
--PROVIDED I HAVE...
...TIME--
--THE SUN!


HE'S FOUND ME!
GREETINGS, MY SON!
YOUR FATHER BRINGS YOU THE BLESSINGS...
... OF A QUICK AND PAINLESS...
...END!
NO!


FOR ALL ITS SIZE...
...THE PLANET IS NOTHING COMPARED TO HALF THE MASS AND SUBSTANCE OF ITS SUN. IN A TWINKLING, IT IS CONSUMED.
BUT NOT SO, ITS VISITOR.
THE GAME CONTINUES.
EXCELLENT.
RUN WHERE YOU WILL, WARLOCK. YOU CANNOT ESCAPE ME.
IN THE END, YOU MUST FACE ME. YOU HAVE NO CHOICE.
AND THEN, I, WHO GAVE YOU LIFE, WILL TAKE IT!
"IT'S A BITTER WIND...
"...BUT MY UNIFORM'S SO WELL-INSULATED, I BARELY NOTICE. I COULD USE A MASK, THOUGH, MY FACE'S NEARLY FROZEN.
"VISIBILITY STINKS. WORSE, THIS RIDGE IS THICK WITH ROCKS AND TREES-- IT'S A PERFECT SPOT FOR AN AMBUSH.
"WHICH IS EXACTLY WHAT I WANT."

" I GET MY WISH.
RRRAR!
THUK
ONLY ONE ARROW LEFT-- EH?!
"FRIGHT..
"...GIVES ME IMPOSSIBLE SPEED.
"THE BEAR MISSES. I DON'T.
ENOUGH, ILLYANA.
ABOUT TIME. YOU LOOK AWFUL.
YOU SHOULD SEE THE OTHER GUY.
THOSE WERE ROBOTS AND ILLUSIONS-- GENERATED BY THE DANGER ROOM--A FLICK OF A SWITCH AND THEY'LL BE GOOD AS NEW. CAN YOU SAY THE SAME ?!
I'LL BE ALL RIGHT.
YOU'VE BEEN AT THIS FOR DAYS, DANI, EACH TEST HARDER AND MORE DANGEROUS THAN THE ONE BEFORE. WHAT'RE YOU TRYING TO PROVE ?!

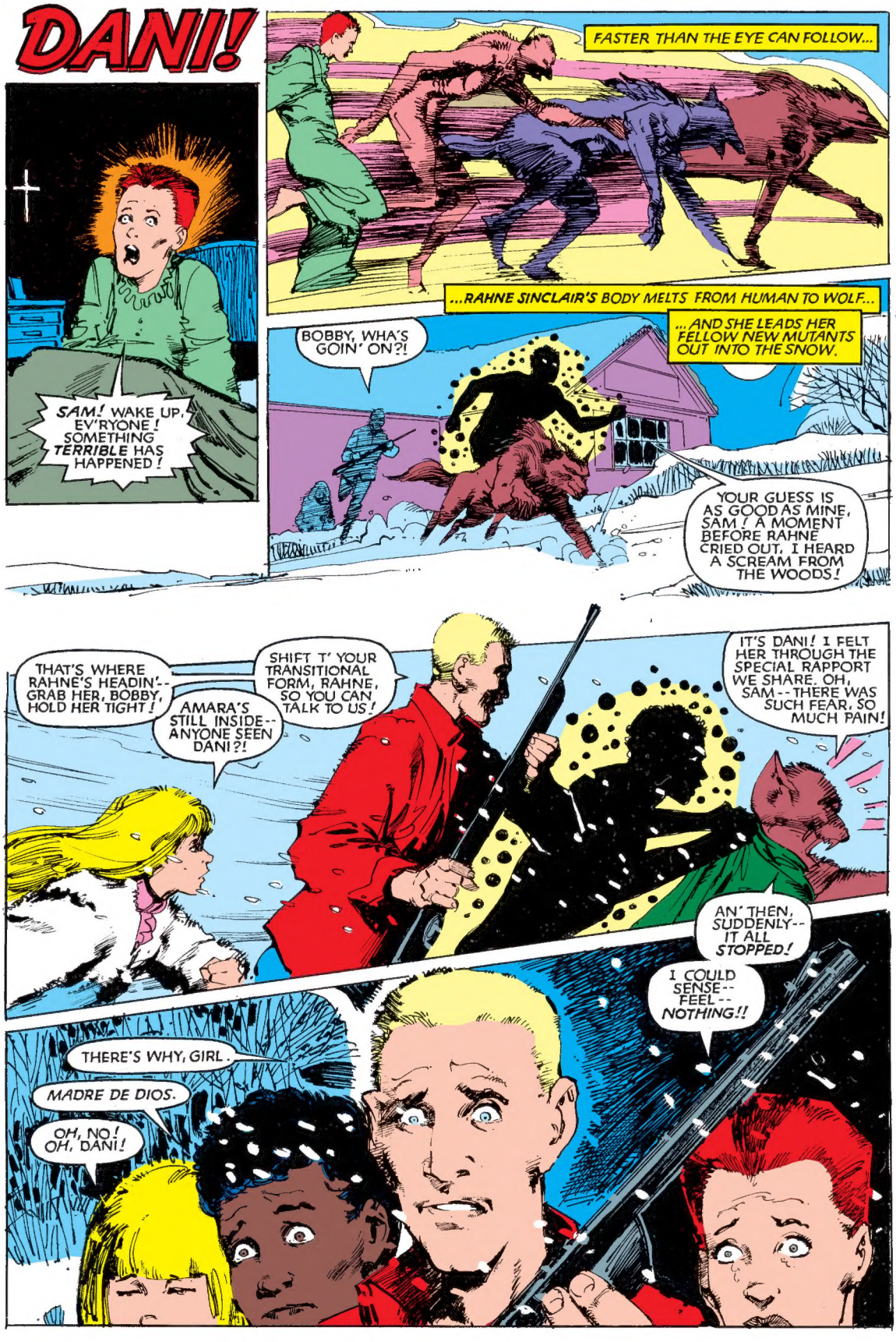

NOT A THING. I'M JUST MAKING SURE THAT--
-- THE NEXT TIME WE TANGLE WITH A FOE MY POWERS CAN'T AFFECT-- I'LL STILL BE ABLE TO PULL MY OWN WEIGHT. I CAN'T AFFORD TO LET YOU GUYS DOWN-- ESPECIALLY IF I'M TEAM LEADER.
MAKES SENSE-- BUT BEARS ?
GOTTA START SOMEWHERE.
NEXT SESSION, WE'LL MOVE ON TO SOMETHING HARDER.
I'M BEAT! IS THERE TIME FOR ME TO SHOWER AND CHANGE BEFORE DINNER?
RRRRRRRRRRRRR
"ILLYANA DIDN'T BELIEVE A WORD I SAID...
"... AND DIDN'T BOTHER HIDING HER ANGER, EITHER. SHE TRUSTED ME WITH HER SECRETS-- THINGS SHE HASN'T TOLD THE X-MEN, OR EVEN HER BEST FRIEND, KITTY PRYDE-- IT HURTS THAT I WON'T DO THE SAME.
"SHE'D HELP IF I ASKED. THEY ALL WOULD.
" THEY DON'T UNDERSTAND-- THIS IS SOMETHING I HAVE TO DO ALONE.


"IT'S MY FAULT MY FOLKS DIED, MY SPIRT- SENDING THAT MADE THEM RIDE INTO THE MOUNTAINS TO FACE THE BEAR.
"THEY DID IT TO PROTECT ME.
"I KNOW NOW-- FROM MY DREAMS--
"-- THE BEAR CARED NOTHING FOR THEM.
"IT WAS ALWAYS ME HE WANTED.
"I WON'T SEE ANYONE ELSE SUFFER IN MY PLACE.
"I AM CHEYENNE! MY FATHER-- MY ANCESTORS-- WERE THE PROUDEST WARRIORS OF THE PLAINS.
"I WILL BE TRUE TO MY NAME AND HERITAGE, NO MATTER WHAT!
"TONIGHT, I'LL PROVE MYSELF WORTHY!"
BEAR!
COME, BUTCHER OF INNOCENTS-- DANIELLE MOONSTAR SUMMONS YOU!
SHOW YOURSELF!

"TO FIND OUT THE MONSTER'S WEAKNESS...
"... AND THROW HIM OFF-BALANCE, I REACH INTO THE PIT OF HIS SOUL...
"... FOR AN IMAGE-- A *SPIRIT-FORM*, REAL AS LIFE-- OF WHAT IT FEARS MOST.
ME?!?
"MY FIRST ARROW IS A KILLING SHOT.

"IT ONLY MAKES THE BEAR MAD."

I DON'T BELIEVE IT-- I WON!
I'VE SLAIN THE DEMON-BEAST THAT MURDERED MY PARENTS!
AT LAST, THEIR SPIRITS ARE AT REST. AND MY NIGHTMARE IS...
... OVER!


DANI!
SAM! WAKE UP, EV'RYONE! SOMETHING TERRIBLE HAS HAPPENED!
FASTER THAN THE EYE CAN FOLLOW...
...RAHNE SINCLAIR'S BODY MELTS FROM HUMAN TO WOLF...
...AND SHE LEADS HER FELLOW NEW MUTANTS OUT INTO THE SNOW.
BOBBY, WHA'S GOIN' ON?!
YOUR GUESS IS AS GOOD AS MINE, SAM! A MOMENT BEFORE RAHNE CRIED OUT, I HEARD A SCREAM FROM THE WOODS!
THAT'S WHERE RAHNE'S HEADIN'-- GRAB HER, BOBBY, HOLD HER TIGHT!
AMARA'S STILL INSIDE-- ANYONE SEEN DANI?!
SHIFT T' YOUR TRANSITIONAL FORM, RAHNE, SO YOU CAN TALK TO US!
IT'S DANI! I FELT HER THROUGH THE SPECIAL RAPPORT WE SHARE. OH, SAM--THERE WAS SUCH FEAR, SO MUCH PAIN!
AN' THEN, SUDDENLY-- IT ALL STOPPED!
I COULD SENSE-- FEEL-- NOTHING!!
THERE'S WHY, GIRL.
MADRE DE DIOS.
OH, NO! OH, DANI!

TO BE CONTINUED

MINUTEMEN
Blutman